

# Decision-Making Capacity Assessment Education for Physicians: Current State and Future Directions

Lesley Charles, MBChB<sup>1</sup>; Jasneet Parmar, MBBS<sup>1</sup>; Suzette Brémault-Phillips, PhD<sup>2</sup>; Bonnie Dobbs, PhD<sup>1</sup>; Lori Sacrey, PhD<sup>3</sup>; Bryan Sluggett, MA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Division of Care of the Elderly, University of Alberta; <sup>2</sup>Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Alberta; <sup>3</sup>Department of Pediatrics, University of Alberta

Corresponding Author: Dr. Lesley Charles (lcharles@ualberta.ca)

## Introduction

- A person's capacity to make personal/financial decisions is an important component of independence.
- As the senior population increases, so does the incidence of dementia, and with it, greater numbers of individuals who will experience a decline in decision-making capacity.
- Due to longstanding relationships and familiarity with patients, family physicians (FPs) are well-positioned to determine medical stability, conduct Decision-Making Capacity Assessments (DMCAs), and formulate opinions.
- While assessment of DMC is inherent in medical practice, there is no evidence that FPs feel confident to assess DMC

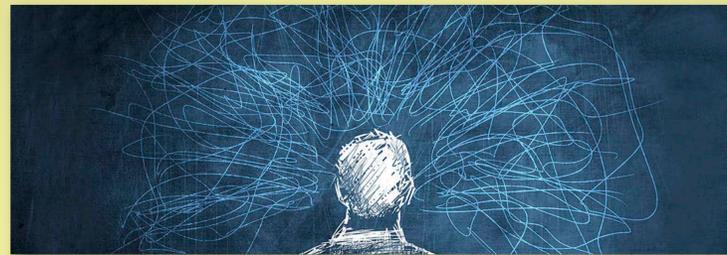
## Study Objective

- To examine the training needs of FPs regarding DMCAs and ways in which training materials, based on a DMCA Model, might be adapted for use by FPs.

## Methods

- Design
  - A scoping review of the literature
  - Qualitative research methodology: Focus groups and structured interviews
- Setting: FPs practicing in Primary Care, Day Programs, Home Living, Supportive/Assisted Living, Long Term Care, Restorative Care, Geriatric Clinics, and Geriatric Inpatient/Rehabilitation Units in the Edmonton Zone, Alberta.
- Participants: FPs self-selected
- Procedure:
  - A scoping review of the literature to examine the current status of physician education regarding DMCAs
  - A focus group and interviews with FPs to ascertain their educational needs in this area.

*As the number of older adults increases, more seniors are likely to experience a decline in their decision-making capacity.*



## Facilitators to Conducting DMCAs

- Physicians are committed to delivering person-centred care.
- An IP team-based approach is valuable in conducting comprehensive DMCAs.
- DMCA Model tools guide the DMCA Process

## Barriers to Conducting DMCAs

- Knowledge gaps regarding DMCAs
- Isolation from IP teams
- Conflicts with families
- Concerns about liability, responsibility to the patient and lack of clarity on billing.

## Recommendations for Enhancing FP Education and Engagement

- Enhanced Training / Education
- Access to IP teams supports holistic and comprehensive DMCAs
- Consultative / Mentoring support would enable FPs to enhance their competencies in DMCAs and discuss complex cases with colleagues
- Appropriate remuneration is needed for services rendered

## Results

- 4 main themes emerged in the scoping review:
  - Increasing saliency of DMCAs due to an aging population
  - Sub-optimal DMCA training for physicians
  - Inconsistent approaches to DMCA
  - Tensions between autonomy and protection
- The findings of the focus groups and interviews indicate that, while FPs working as independent practitioners or on inter-professional (IP) teams are motivated to engage in DMCAs and utilize the DMCA Model for those assessments, several factors impede them from conducting DMCAs, notably:
  - A lack of education
  - Isolation from IP teams
  - Uneasiness around managing conflict with families
  - Fear of liability
  - Concerns regarding remuneration.

## Discussion

- Population aging and increases in the number of individuals with dementia will result in an increase in the demand for DMCAs.
- Aligned with the scoping review, participants in the focus groups and interviews agreed that education and training is critical for enabling them to effectively and confidently conduct DMCAs which.
- It is clear that there is no consistent approach to conducting DMCAs.

## Conclusion

This research project has helped to inform ways to better train and support FPs conducting DMCAs. FPs are well-positioned, with proper training, to effectively conduct DMCAs. To engage in the process, however, the barriers should be addressed.

